1: Herskovits E-4, 6 (1936) 1937 SV3 Haiti SV3

[History of Haiti in 17th-18th Centuries — The Haitian white population]

cannot read the extended narrative of the young Comte de C***, reprinted by de Vastière, without questioning this myth of the idyllic life of the Haitian Créole, even though allowing for the disdain with which an exiled Parisian dandy of 1730 would regard the inhabitants of outlying possessions, and allowing also for the savory wit of the man, which undoubtedly led him to underscore the more diverting situations which he encountered.[34]

Mention must be made at this point of the two great divisions of the white population which, as the colonizing period continued, were created by the distinction between those born on the island and those who had migrated there. These divisions cut across the two categories of urban and country dwellers, both of which numbered Haitian-born and native European members. At the time of the French Revolution about three quarters of the whites on the island had been born outside the colony, while of those born in the colony, women comprised the major portion.[35] Haitian-born persons were known by the designation *Créole*, which, according to a definition of the period, included all those "who have first seen the light of day in Santo Domingo" and was, as it is today, a term employed in all the West Indies and in Louisiana.[36] This designation was by no means restricted to the whites, however, for there were Créole Negroes as well as Créole whites; at the present time in Haiti a distinction is even drawn between locally grown "créole" rice and that which is imported!

It is common knowledge that slavery not only affects those who are held in bondage, but deeply influences the master-class as well. In Haiti the role played by the institution of slavery in the formation of the character and personalities of Créole children brought up in a setting of servility, cupidity, brutality, and terror must have been of the utmost importance. The bad temper and domineering nature of Créole youths is commented on again and again by writers of the period. Owing to the unhealthy climate and the failure to

1: Herskovits E-4, 8 (1934) 1937 SV3 Haiti SV3

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maintain adequate hygienic conditions, the health of these children was usually poor, so that from earliest infancy they were spoiled by their parents and servants; their least wishes were gratified, and their least complaints immediately rectified so as to make them petty tyrants in their households. This tyranny was most often exercised over the family slaves. Regardless of the assiduous care these young despots received, and despite the adulation lavished upon their young charges, the Negro servants were seldom sufficiently prompt or adequate in their attentiveness to escape the punishments, often severe, that were meted out to them at the behest of their young masters. This tyranny extended to the play-life of the young Haitian-born white. Surrounded only by the slave children of the plantation, he commanded his contemporaries even more imperiously than his parents commanded the grown slaves.

> "Whatever he saw, he wanted, whatever was shown him he demanded; and if some fatality brought it about that one of his small companions resisted him and he became irritated, they would hurry from all sides in response to his cries and those of the young unfortunate, who, his color having destined him for submission, learned soon enough that he would be forced to give way, perhaps even being meted some punishment to penalize the disobedience of one who had not yet the instinct for servitude." [1]

175 563 567 591 (859) (159)

Grown to manhood, the young Créole continued to act as master of all he surveyed. Imperious, quick-tempered, spoiled, his life lived in large part among slaves, when his sex drive stirred, he took what slave women pleased him. Eventually he married, to be tormented with the thoughts of the possible infidelity of his wife; the more tortured because of his extreme vanity and because, while demanding faithfulness from his spouse, he was continuing his affairs with his Negro women. Yet he had some excellences of character, as well. "Frank,

1: Herskovits E-4, 5 (1936) 1937 SV3 Haiti SV3 Mirebalais

595 593 671 The fact that Haitian law recognizes only monogamy introduces numerous overtones into the daily life of the people. If a church-wed wife discovers that her husband makes periodic visits to another woman, whether *placée* or not, serious quarreling between the legal wife and her husband follows. The "wife" may refuse to give food to her husband or to speak to him, and will upbraid him before their children, calling him *vagabond* — a strong word of opprobrium to the Haitian — and other terms which her facile tongue readily finds at hand. The status of the children under this dual family system is another reflection of the values it engenders. And though the account of this given in Mirebalais represents a folk-reaction rather than official procedure — for according to officials in the capital it does not exist in Haitian law — its value as a living belief which gives insight into the relevant attitudes outweighs its possible lack of validity in a legal sense.

858 In Mirebalais it is held that there are what may be spoken of as three classes of offspring. The first, which may be termed "natural" children, are those born to a man by his *placée* wife or wives before his Church marriage, or to a *placée* woman whose mating with him was later legalized by the rites of Church and State. The second class, the "legitimate" children, comprises those born to couples married in the strict legal sense of the word. Finally, a third category consists [858] of those who may be called "illegitimate" children, and includes all the offspring of any *placée* spouse of a man taken by him after his Church marriage, or children of any of his earlier *placée* wives born subsequent to this marriage. None of these classes of children are at any special social disadvantage, and all not only inherit the African deities of their father, but must also fulfill their spiritual obligations toward him after his death by wearing mourning and performing all other required rituals.

582 851 Legally, however, the matter is different, for only the children born to a marriage recorded by the justice of the peace

J: Herskovits E-4, 8 (1934) 1937 SV3 Haiti SV3
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belong to the father, who, in turn, is the legally recognized father of all the offspring of his wife unless he divorces her—something which, because of Church regulations, occurs but rarely. Children born outside legal marriage have no right to the name of their father. Such a one is entered under his mother's name in the record of births, though he may and often does take his father's name in school or later in life, this ultimately becoming the name by which he is known and which he hands on to his children. It is in the inheritance of the father's property that children born of the various types of matings are said to be most strongly differentiated, though it was particularly with this method of distributing heritable goods reported in Mirebalais that officials in the capital disagreed. The assertion is made that while the children of a "legal" wife inherit three quarters of the estate, and the other "natural" children receive one fourth, the "illegitimate" offspring have no legal right to any of the dead man's property. They must either be provided for by their father before his death or be aided on occasion by a natural brother who has inherited from their common father and feels a moral obligation toward these children of their father. Children of plural wives call each other by the terms "brother" and "sister," and in some instances they get on fairly well together. More generally, however, their attitudes toward one another are colored by those of their mothers, so that verbal if not physical encounters may take place when they meet.

Where, as perhaps in the majority of cases, there is a monogamous union, "legal" or "*placée*," cemented by mutual affection and mutual interest in the future of the children, life goes on calmly. Each spouse performs the tasks allotted by custom, and the children are reared in an atmosphere which varies with the fortunes and temperaments of those who make up the household. Fathers are said to prefer their daughters, and mothers their sons, among their children, but for this the Haitian has no explanation other than the phrase: "This is natural."

1: Herskovits E-4, 8 (1936) 1937 SV3 Haiti SV3 Miveb.lab

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parents are friendly toward each other, so that the conflict that might result from a division of authority rarely develops. Were it otherwise, it could easily happen that a person who had been ordered, or forbidden, to do something against his own wishes by the head of his paternal family would plead with the head of his mother's group and receive support to justify his disobedience. To most Haitians such a hypothetical incident was amusing to contemplate, for the elders are said always to work together. Rare is the occasion when one interferes with the decision of another, and never to the knowledge of the subject of such a decision.

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A family elder who has no sons to care for him is well looked after by the other members of the group "until the grave." Fear as well as a moral obligation prompts this. "He might curse you," it is explained, or "He might say: 'Watch out for your own old age! You mistreated me in my old age, and you will suffer in yours.'" Such pronouncements are greatly dreaded, especially because of his control over the supernatural forces that aid or harm the family and its members.

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The closeness of the tie between social institutions and economic life is most evident in the matter of inheritance. For though the prestige that accrues from the possession of wealth makes for strong competition through the exercise of individual initiative, yet supporting the struggle of an individual for the augmentation of his holdings are the forces of family sanction and family aid, while his very start in life is obtained primarily through the help of his relatives during their lifetime or the property he inherits from them at their death.

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As has been suggested, all a man's children by a "legally" married wife inherit from him, or, if he has not espoused a wife by a Church wedding, the children of his *placée* wife or wives receive his property. Whether or not it is true that the "legitimate" children inherit three quarters of the possessions of their father, the "natural" children one fourth, and

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1: Herskovits E-4, 5 (1934) 1937 SV3 Haiti SV3
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the "illegitimate" none, it would seem that the children of the legal marriage have a "social duty" to care for those of a *placée* wife who receive nothing, a moral obligation which is met because of a far stronger sanction than the fear of gossip. The belief holds that the dead will deeply resent an injustice to any of his children and will cause misfortune to befall a man who does not fulfill his duty toward those who should have shared in the property of their father.

Those who do inherit divide the land, flocks, herds, and all other possessions of the deceased equally, regardless of age or sex. If a man is wealthy, he may draw up a will providing for the disposal of such items of his property as under Haitian law it is not mandatory to apportion among his children. Where there is not enough land to permit each of the survivors to work an individual plot, this may be sold and the money distributed, or those who retain the land may buy an equivalent acreage elsewhere for the others, so that some of the members of the family leave the habitation to make new homes of their own in the manner already described. Similarly, though in dividing the land it is customary to allot a good parcel to the son who has worked it, if the other land is much worse and the division is disputed, an arrangement paralleling the one described may be made to allow of a fairer division. When an heir who, for instance, has taken up permanent residence in Port-au-Prince wishes to dispose of his share instead of returning to work it or of having it cultivated for him, he sells it to his brothers and sisters, or, rarely, to a stranger, for all effort is made to retain ancestral land within the family. Similarly, a part of the property of the dead may be sold to meet claims on his estate—debts or funeral costs or the expense of erecting a tomb. This would be particularly true if these expenses had been met by one of the heirs, in which case he must be compensated before the estate may be divided. Consultation with the family elders always precedes such action, however.